

# Red Joan: The True Story of Jennie Rooney, the British Grandmother Who Spied for the Soviet Union

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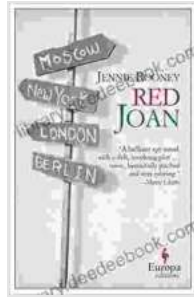
Jennie Rooney was born in 1912 in Bexleyheath, Kent, England. Her father was a clerk in the War Office, and her mother was a teacher. From a young age, Jennie exhibited a keen interest in intellectual pursuits and social justice. She was particularly inspired by the writings of Karl Marx and the ideals of socialism. In her late teens, she joined the Communist Party of Great Britain, becoming an active member and attending political meetings and rallies.

The outbreak of World War II in 1939 marked a turning point in Jennie's life. She was deeply affected by the rise of fascism and the threat it posed to the world. In 1943, she began working as a secretary at the British Non-Ferrous Metals Research Association, a government research laboratory involved in the British nuclear weapons program. Jennie's access to classified documents and her sympathetic views towards the Soviet Union, who were seen as allies in the war against Nazi Germany, led to her recruitment by the Soviet intelligence service, the NKVD.

**Red Joan** by Jennie Rooney

★★★★☆ 4.3 out of 5

Language : English



File size	: 1432 KB
Text-to-Speech	: Enabled
Screen Reader	: Supported
Enhanced typesetting	: Enabled
X-Ray	: Enabled
Word Wise	: Enabled
Print length	: 402 pages
Lending	: Enabled



As Red Joan, Jennie provided the Soviet Union with vital information about the development of the British atomic bomb. Her access to highly confidential documents allowed her to pass on technical drawings, blueprints, and other sensitive data, which gave the Soviets a significant advantage in their own nuclear program. Jennie's espionage activities were facilitated through a network of Soviet agents, including Leo Long, her handler, and Donald Maclean, a member of the infamous Cambridge spy ring.

In 1951, Donald Maclean, one of Red Joan's contacts, defected to the Soviet Union along with his colleague, Guy Burgess. Maclean's defection sent shockwaves through the British intelligence community and cast suspicion on others involved in the spy ring. Jennie Rooney remained under suspicion, but there was not enough evidence to convict her at that time.

In the 1990s, interest in the Cambridge spy ring and their wartime activities was renewed. MI5, the British domestic intelligence agency, launched a thorough investigation into the case, which included reviewing old files and

interviewing potential suspects. It was during this investigation that Jennie Rooney's cover was finally blown.

In 1999, at the age of 87, Jennie Rooney confessed to her role as Red Joan. She admitted to passing secrets to the Soviet Union for ideological reasons, believing that it was necessary to counterbalance the threat posed by the United States and to promote world peace. Rooney's confession sent shockwaves through British society, with many expressing amazement that such an unassuming grandmother could have been involved in such high-level espionage.

Jennie Rooney was never prosecuted for her actions, as the offenses for which she was charged had exceeded the statute of limitations. However, she was stripped of her Order of the British Empire, which had been awarded to her in 1965 for her contributions to metallurgy. Rooney spent her remaining years in relative obscurity, passing away in 2004 at the age of 91.

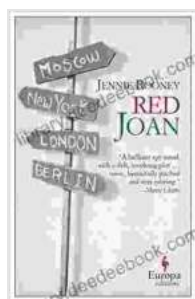
The motivations behind Jennie Rooney's actions as Red Joan are complex and multifaceted. Ideologically, she believed in communism and saw her espionage activities as a way to promote world peace and prevent a nuclear conflict. She was also influenced by her experiences during World War II, which shaped her views on the dangers of fascism and the importance of collective security.

The consequences of Red Joan's espionage are equally complex. The atomic secrets she passed to the Soviet Union undoubtedly accelerated their nuclear weapons program, potentially altering the course of the Cold War. Her actions also damaged the trust between the United Kingdom and

its allies, particularly the United States. Furthermore, her story serves as a reminder of the enduring legacy of Cold War espionage and the lengths to which individuals may go in the name of ideology.

The story of Red Joan has captured the imagination of historians, writers, and filmmakers alike. Her life has been the subject of numerous books, documentaries, and even a 2018 feature film starring Judi Dench. Red Joan's tale continues to resonate with audiences today, offering insights into the complexities of espionage, ideological loyalties, and the often-blurred lines between patriotism and betrayal.

Jennie Rooney, the woman behind the codename Red Joan, was a complex and enigmatic figure whose life was forever shaped by her involvement in espionage. Her actions as a spy for the Soviet Union had far-reaching consequences, both for the course of the Cold War and for the reputation of Britain's intelligence services. Yet, beneath the cloak of secrecy and political intrigue, Jennie Rooney remained a grandmother with deeply held ideals and a belief in a better world. Her story serves as a cautionary tale about the potential dangers of ideological extremism while also highlighting the enduring power of human agency and the sacrifices individuals may make in the pursuit of their convictions.



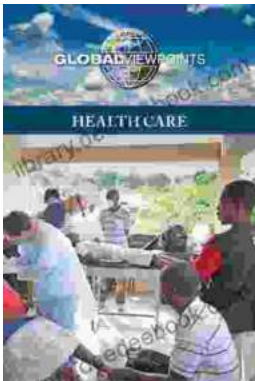
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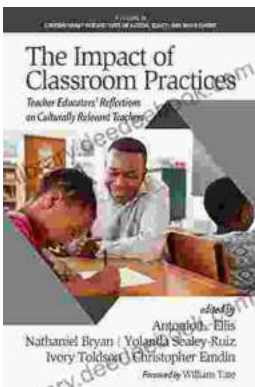
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